

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9838

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 4878

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: AEMR, CB, US
SUBJ: E&E: VOLUNTARY AGENCIES

REF: STATE 060009 (NODIS)

1. I REGRET THAT JOURNALISTS REPORTING FROM HERE MISINTERPRETED SOME ACTIONS TAKEN YESTERDAY BY THE CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICE. ON MARCH 17 FOUR CRS WORKERS LEFT COUNTRY. ALL FOUR OF THEM WERE DUE FOR HOME LEAVE AND THEIR DEPARTURE DATE WAS ONLY MOVED UP BY A FEW DAYS. OF THESE FOUR, THREE WERE DANISH NURSES WHO ARE SCHEDULED TO RETURN TO CAMBODIA AFTER VACATION AND ONE WAS A SCOTTISH DOCTOR.

2. OF THE 35 CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICE STAFF MEMBERS ASSIGNED HERE, 31 ARE PRESENTLY IN-COUNTRY. THE HEAD OF THE TEAM, FATHER GEHRING, WAS SOMEWHAT PERTURBED BY THE NEWS FROM WASHINGTON ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR ADDITIONAL AMERICAN AID AND AS A PRECAUTIONARY MOVE HAD BEEN THINKING OF REDUCING THE SIZE OF THE REMAINING PRESENT TEAM OF 31 BY AN ADDITIONAL 10. AS A RESULT OF MY CONVERSATION WITH HIM, HE IS NOT TAKING THIS ACTION.

3. I HAVE PASSED THE WORD TO THE HEADS OF ALL THE VOLAGS THAT UNDER THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES IT IS NOT PRUDENT FOR THEM TO KEEP THEIR PEOPLE IN THE PROVINCIAL ENCLAVES UNLESS THERE IS ALSO A POL/MIL REPRESENTATIVE CO-LOCATED THERE. THIS IS STRICTLY A SECURITY PRECAUTION, SINCE THE POL/

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MIL REPRESENTATIVES HAVE RADIO FACILITIES AND READY

ACCESS TO AIRCRAFT ASSETS IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY. THUS AT KOMPONG THOM, FOR EXAMPLE, WHERE THE POL/MIL REPRESENTATIVE HAS DEPARTED, CRS HAS ALSO MOVED OUT ITS PEOPLE. THE THREE DANISH NURSES WHO ARE GOING ON HOME LEAVE WORKED IN KOMPONG THOM.

4. WE ARE SUGGESTING TO THE VOLAGS THAT THEY HAVE THEIR AMERICAN AND TCN STAFF MEMBERS WORK PRIMARILY OUT OF PHNOM PENH AND VISIT THE ENCLAVES ONLY FOR THE DAY IF FEASIBLE. THIS MAKES IT EASIER FOR US TO KEEP TRACK OF THEM IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY. A FEW VOLAG REPS REMAIN UP-COUNTRY BUT THEY ARE CO-LOCATED WITH POL/MIL REPS.

5. THE PRESS STORIES FILED OUT OF PHNOM PENH WERE PROBABLY DESIGNED TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE DEPARTURE OF MANY FOREIGN EMBASSIES WILL SOON BE FOLLOWED BY THE AMERICAN EMBASSY. I EXPLAINED PERSONALLY TO SOME JOURNALISTS LATE YESTERDAY AFTERNOON THAT THE ENTIRE AMERICAN MISSION IS IN PLACE AND THAT THE VOLAGS CONTINUE TO CARRY OUT THEIR MISSION WHICH IS PROBABLY NOW MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER BEFORE.

6. AS FOR THE BURNING OF EMBASSY FILES, I THINK IT IS PRUDENT UNDER THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES TO GET RID OF EXCESS FILES WHICH HAVE BEEN ACCUMULATING OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS; HOWEVER THE BURNING OF CLASSIFIED MATERIAL IS (AS CORRECTLY EXPLAINED IN REFTEL), A DAILY ONGOING AND COMPLETELY NORMAL ACTIVITY.

7. I CONCLUDE THAT SOME OF THE AMERICAN JOURNALISTS IN THIS TOWN ARE DEDICATED TO THE EFFORT OF MAINTAINING A FLOW OF REPORTING STRESSING GLOOM, DESPAIR AND INEVITABLE DEFEAT FOR THE GKR. IF THEY WERE TRUTHFUL IN THEIR REPORTING, THEY WOULD BE STRESSING THAT THE AMERICAN REPRESENTATION HERE -- BOTH OFFICIAL AND VOLUNTARY AGENCY -- HAS REMAINED SUBSTANTIALLY UNCHANGED OVER THE LAST FEW WEEKS AND HAS NOT FLINCHED IN THE FACE OF PESSIMISTIC PRESS FORECASTS ORIGINATING IN WASHINGTON ON PROSPECTS FOR SUPPLEMENTAL AMERICAN AID FOR CAMODIA.

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